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Nations of the Bible

ASSYRIA

ASSYRIA, AS A geographical location, is mentioned very early in the Bible. Genesis chapter 2 refers to one of the rivers that went out of Eden and which flowed towards *'the east of Assyria'*.¹ This is probably a reference to the city of Assur. A little later, in chapter 10, we are told of the origins of Assyria. One of the three sons of Noah was Shem and he had a son by the name of Assur (or Asshur) and from this name Assyria is derived. Assur was the capital city of Ancient Assyria and its culture owed much to the Babylonians and Hittites.

As a nation, Assyria is first mentioned in 2 Kings 15 when Menahem was king of Israel and Uzziah (or Azariah) was on the throne of Judah. All the kings of Israel and most of Judah's were wicked, and because they were God's covenant people, He allowed the neighbouring nations to bring divine judgements on His disobedient and divided nation. A number of times the Assyrians and Babylonians invaded their land to the utter humiliation of Israel. If respect had been shown to the commands of the Creator they would have inherited a land free from the domination of the surrounding nations, regardless of the greatness of that power. When the Assyrians were in the ascendancy, Israel was in decline, and vice versa. History records that Assyria was at its lowest at the end of Solomon's reign of peace, but afterwards the subjects rebelled against the authority of God which resulted in the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon. Jeroboam, who succeeded Solomon as king of Israel, was a very wicked ruler, so much so, it was by his standard that later kings were compared. In his day the Assyrian power held sway over the ancient world.

The British Museum displays a stela of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) from Nimrud. The king is holding a mace in his left hand, and his right hand is extended with outstretched forefinger which is said to be a gesture of respect and supplication towards the symbols of five gods. This Assyrian monarch was the first great national conqueror. He transferred the capital from Assur to Kalhu (Calah)² now known as Nimrud. Once

¹Genesis 2.14 NKJV ²Genesis 10.11 NKJV



Lower half: shows Tiglath-Pileser in his chariot. Circa 738 BC

again, as Israel descended more deeply into the depths of wickedness, the power of Assyria rose to greater heights.

It is recorded that Ahab, king of Israel, ‘...*did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him ... he took as wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians; and he went and served Baal and worshipped him*’.³ Israel, the covenant people could have enjoyed tremendous privileges and blessings because of their unique relationship with God. Before they entered the promised land they were told very forcibly that if they remained obedient to God ‘*to observe carefully all his commandments ... the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth*’, and then there is recorded a long list of blessings for obedience.⁴ They could have been the happiest people on the face of the earth but how fickle is human nature? They wanted to be like the other nations! Why was this? Well, they could then satisfy all those fleshly desires - doing just what they liked. They did not want to be tied down to laws that they detested. God had also clearly warned them that if they turned their back on His law, He would turn His back on them causing them to suffer for their disobedience:

³1 Kings 16.30-33 NKJV ⁴Deuteronomy 28.1-14 NKJV

‘...if you do not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all his commandments ... all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.’

and one of those many curses was:

‘...you shall serve your enemies, whom **the LORD will send against you.**’⁵

A CONFEDERACY AGAINST ASSYRIA

So wicked King Ahab was turned to idolatrous Baal worship to the rejection of the true God by his evil wife Jezebel. Because of mounting pressure from Assyria, Ahab joined in a confederacy with Syria against Assyria and history records that Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria, invaded Syria in 854 BC. The Assyrian threat was so great in the Middle East that a confederacy of twelve nations faced Israel. This was in the last year of Ahab’s reign. We see the mercy of God in the fact that He did not destroy Israel at that time even though their wickedness was great, but the prophets Elijah and Elisha were sent for the purpose of exhorting the people to repent, and miraculous powers were given to the two men as proof that they were God’s messengers.

Omri and Ahab’s wicked dynasty was taken out of the way and Israel was given a fresh start under Jehu who was instrumental in carrying out an important commission. He was responsible for the wholesale destruction of the worshippers in the temple of Baal: *‘Thus Jehu destroyed Baal from Israel.’*⁶ Israel still did not prosper under Jehu, because his true character is seen in the toleration of idol worship - *‘But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart; for he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam, who had made Israel sin.’*⁷

The British Museum displays the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III from Nimrud circa 825 BC, which depicts his victories over some of the kingdoms in Syria and also Israel and shows various kings offering tribute to Assyria. One scene specifically mentions Jehu, king of Israel, and it is generally thought that he is the prostrate figure submitting to Shalmaneser. (See picture page 6)

After a period of decline, Assyria emerged as a formidable power with the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III. This is of great interest to students of scripture because it reveals the hand of God at work with Assyria and His people Israel.

⁵Deuteronomy 28.15-68 NKJV ⁶2 Kings 10.12-28 NKJV ⁷2 Kings 10.31 NKJV

God has a plan for the world and the Bible reveals His control of future events to further that plan.

TIGLATH-PILESER III

It was Tiglath-Pileser III who established Assyria as a great empire. He extended his dominion eastward into the country of Media now known as Iran. It seems that whilst he was engaged in these conquests problems were arising in the western portion of the empire - *'Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to make war; and they besieged Ahaz but could not overcome him'*.⁸ We also read of this invasion in Isaiah's prophecy and the prophet assured Ahaz that there was nothing to fear.⁹

The invading nations said *'Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabeel - thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand. Nor shall it come to pass"'*.¹⁰ But unfortunately, man's faith in the great Creator is weak, even though God's assurance was given. Ahaz put his trust in the things he could see - *'So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me."'*¹¹ He even went as far as committing sacrilege to please the Assyrian king by removing the silver and gold from the house of the Lord and also the treasures of the king's house. He sent it as a present to the king of Assyria.¹²

The message of the word of God is clear. Put your trust in what God has declared regardless of apparent difficulties. God's word cannot fail, and if Ahaz had put his trust in the word of God, the threat that he was so concerned about would have diminished.

ASSYRIA CONQUERS ISRAEL

But Ahaz' lack of trust in the true God is demonstrated a little later when he went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser. He saw an idol altar there and built a replica and offered sacrifices on it. In the book of Leviticus, God clearly instructed His people not to make for themselves idols or graven images to bow down to. If they chose to reject this command, God said *'I will set my face against you, and you*

⁸2 Kings 16.5 NKJV ⁹Isaiah 7.4 NKJV ¹⁰Isaiah 7.6,7 NKJV ¹¹2 Kings 16.7 NKJV

¹²2 Kings 16.8 NKJV

shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you',¹³ and so the denial of God by Ahaz resulted in the mastery of Assyria - 'The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house.'¹⁴

Again and again Assyria was the agent of God to punish His people for their depravity. They were cast out as a prey, pounced upon by the Assyrian eagle:¹⁵

'Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger and the staff in whose hand is my indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of my wrath I will give him charge, to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.'¹⁶

Their conquests were divinely directed against the ten tribe kingdom of Israel because of their idolatry and rejection of their God. The Assyrians did not know they were doing God's work, of course; they thought that their many successes were the blessings showered upon them by their own gods, but the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria¹⁷ was soon to learn that there was a far greater power.

THE THREAT AGAINST JUDAH

The kingdom of Judah at that time had a good king, Hezekiah, but the commander of the army of king Sennacherib, Rabshakeh, did not accept that the God of another nation was more powerful than their gods. At the gates of Jerusalem the haughtiness of Rabshakeh is seen when speaking to those in the city:

'Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria: "In what do you trust, that you remain under siege in Jerusalem? Does not Hezekiah persuade you to give yourselves over to die by famine and by thirst, saying, 'The Lord our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria?'..." "Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands in any way able to deliver their lands out of my hand? Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed that could deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand?"'¹⁸

¹³Leviticus 26.17 NKJV ¹⁴Isaiah 7.17 NKJV ¹⁵Hosea 8.1 NKJV ¹⁶Isaiah 10.5,6 NKJV

¹⁷Isaiah 10.12 NKJV ¹⁸2 Chron 32.10-14 NKJV

Rabshakeh was saying that it was a contest between the gods of Nineveh and the God of Israel, so Hezekiah did the right thing, he prayed to God for help. We now see what the prayer of a man of faith in the one true God can accomplish: ‘...King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah,...prayed and cried out to heaven.’¹⁹ Hezekiah needed to do no more than that for that night the angel of the Lord destroyed 185,000 men in the camp of the Assyrians.²⁰

Sennacherib’s own views about the siege of Jerusalem can be seen on the hexagonal clay prism, known as the Taylor Prism in the British Museum.



Jehu, king of Israel, offering tribute to Shalmaneser Circa 841 BC

THE CITY OF NINEVEH

The city of Nineveh was the last capital of Assyria, approximately 22 miles (35 km) further north along the Tigris from Nimrud and was more than twice the size of Nimrud. The prophet Jonah was told to ‘go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me.’²¹ The population was stated to be 120,000 persons who did not know right from wrong.²² In its heyday, Nineveh was a magnificent city surrounded by a wall of more than seven miles in circumference. Assyria

¹⁹2 Chron 32.20 NKJV ²⁰2 Kings 19.35 NKJV ²¹Jonah 1.2 NKJV ²²Jonah 4.11 NKJV

had become so amazingly wealthy by its incessant spoiling of other nations. The prophet Nahum calls Nineveh '*city of bloods*' because of the wars in which it had been engaged for centuries with the surrounding nations and also for the cruelty they practised.

Hundreds of Jews lived in the city in Sennacherib's day and he caused many to be massacred. Although the Jews had been taken into captivity many times for their denial of God, they were still His people, and the prophet Nahum, 200 years after Jonah, delivered his message against Nineveh:

'The LORD has given a command concerning you: "Your name shall be perpetuated no longer. Out of the house of your gods I will cut off the carved image and the moulded image. I will dig your grave, for you are vile."²³

God had determined that His judgements would be brought against that profane city. At that time a rebellion was fermenting against Assyria. Massive walls and barred gates were no security for the Ninevites against the power of the Almighty. The Medes and the Babylonians executed this sentence in 612 BC exactly as Nahum had prophesied.

We read in chapter 3:

'...Nineveh is laid waste! Who will bemoan her?...She went into captivity ...The gates of your land are wide open for your enemies; fire shall devour the bars of your gates...The sword will cut you off; it will eat you up like a locust...O king of Assyria; your nobles rest in the dust. Your people are scattered on the mountains, and no one gathers them.'²⁴

Another prophet Zephaniah declared:

'...Destroy Assyria, and make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness ...This is the rejoicing city that dwelt securely, that said in her heart, I am it, and there is none besides me. How has she become a desolation...!'²⁵

Once again, the British Museum confirms the prophetic words for tablets removed from the ruins are marked by fire as stated in prophecy, and this once magnificent city never recovered. Nahum wrote '*He will*

²³Nahum 1.14 NKJV ²⁴Nahum 3.7,10,13,15,18 NKJV ²⁵Zephaniah 2.13-15 NKJV

*make an utter end of its place.*²⁶ But as the Bible clearly foretold the rise and fall of ancient nations, it also predicted a destruction soon to come upon the earth of which Assyria is a type.

ASSYRIA IN PROPHECY

The 'latter day Assyrian' will also come down on God's people, Israel, and will likewise suffer the same fate. This is the northern power mentioned in Ezekiel's prophecy chapter 38. *'Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh.'*²⁷ Gog is identified with Russia or Rosh. The Russian Bible translates this as *'prince of Russia'*. As Assyria of old, she will covet the land of Israel, and the arrogant latter day tyrant will invade the land just as Assyria did in the past.

Micah's prophecy refers to the Assyrian nation but was only partly fulfilled. We read of the birth of Christ²⁸ which was about 600 years after that nation's demise and it is Christ who is referred to in verse 5:

*'...When the Assyrian comes into our land, and when he treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princely men. They shall waste with the sword the land of Assyria...he shall deliver us from the Assyrian, when he comes into our land...'*²⁹

The deliverer will be Christ, who will return to the earth with power and great glory, and with him *'seven shepherds and eight princely men'* - these represent a glorified multitude, the faithful ones from all generations, who will be resurrected from the dust of the earth and glorified and to whom is promised the inheritance of the earth, cleansed from the curse of sin and death. They will have the honour and joy of bringing righteousness and peace to the world.

The world now is filled with wickedness and the only remedy is declared in scripture:

*'...when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.'*³⁰

Michael Guest
Kingswinford
West Midlands

²⁶Nahum 1.8 NKJV ²⁷Ezekiel 38.2 NKJV ²⁸Micah 5.2 NKJV ²⁹Micah 5.5 ³⁰Isaiah 26.9

Where are YOU Going?

The Narrow Way to Life

SO WE COME to the parting of the ways on our journey through life! For those who choose to follow the 'Narrow Way'- the more difficult way - there is perhaps some apprehension as to what lies ahead. Especially in the light of the words of Jesus: *'For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few'*.¹

But having chosen this way, the 'Narrow Way', we are not left on our own! We have a guide, we have help! Jesus has told us the way to eternal life is not going to be easy, but God's Word also tells us we will have plenty of help to guide us, to protect us and to bring us safely and successfully to the end of our journey. For example we are told: *'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path'*.²

The point is, that if we start out on this journey without guidance, we will soon get lost! So we must start out on the 'Narrow Way' with the Bible as our guide. Hopefully, we have promised we will follow this guide book and its instructions in the footsteps of Jesus, who has already trodden this 'Narrow Way'. If you study the life of Jesus, you will see how he used the scriptures that were available to him for his guidance. For example, you will see from a reading of the gospel records that much of the time during his ministry, Jesus was followed around by his enemies who were trying to trap him, to catch him out in what he taught. They tried to make him turn from the 'Narrow Way', but he answered in most instances from the scriptures.

Right from the start of his journey, Jesus went through a tempting ordeal in the wilderness.³ The temptation for him was the same as for all of us - the urge to take the easy way. For example, he was hungry and he

¹Matthew 7. 14 (RSV) ²Psalms 119. 105 ³Luke 4. 1-13

had the power of the Holy Spirit at his command. He could have made bread from the stones around him, but God had not given him this power to use for his self-gratification. Jesus rejected the thought by bringing to mind the teaching of God's Word: *'It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God'*.⁴

Then Jesus was urged to use the power residing in him to take the kingdoms of the world for himself. The extent of this temptation from the 'Narrow Way' is only realised by the fact that God had promised Jesus power over the nations. *'Thou art my Son ... Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen [nations] for thine inheritance.'*⁵ Jesus knew this to be God's promise to him, but he also knew that there were many other things he had to do before this could happen. It is possible he had the power to take the kingdoms for himself then, but he knew that was not God's purpose. So we see that he rejected the easy way, to follow the hard path that God required. He quoted the words of Scripture *'... it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve'*.⁶



*The 'Narrow Way'.
Few there be that find
it. Matt 7.13,14*

Those words of Jesus illustrate for us the point of following Jesus in this 'Narrow Way'. It is to serve God, to do His will and to follow His

⁴Luke 4.4 ⁵Psalm 2. 7, 8 ⁶Luke 4. 8

commandments, without bringing in our own ideas, or to even attempt to water down or suggest alternatives to make the way to eternal life easier. In fact, any attempt to alter the instructions in His Word means we have left the 'Narrow' path already and have started along the broader way to destruction!

When we make the decision to walk the 'Narrow Way', we must realise that it has restrictions for us as it did for Jesus. We no longer walk to please ourselves. We have set out on a path that is not self-centred, but a way - a way of life - that sets out to help others. We must help not only our close relatives but all with whom we come into contact. The teaching of Jesus about the Good Samaritan⁷ points to the way we should tread this narrow path and it tells a story about people on a journey. But one interesting point to note is that Jesus was again answering a man who was trying to tempt him. The man asked, '*Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*'⁸ Now we notice how Jesus again refers the man to God's Word. '*What is written in the law?*'⁹ This man knew full well what was written in the law, because he was a lawyer. He said '*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.*'¹⁰ Jesus commended the man for this answer, but the man, still trying to trip Jesus up said '*And who is my neighbour?*'¹¹

The two commandments that Jesus referred to here have within them all the principles we need to follow the 'Narrow Way' - love of God, love of neighbour and a selfless walk through life. These are the very opposite of the natural instincts and thoughts of mankind. But the parable that was spoken by Jesus to answer this man who was trying to catch him out, shows brilliantly the practical effect which these commandments should have on our personal lives, in walking the 'Narrow Way'! It relates a story of a man on a journey who was attacked by thieves, robbed and left half dead.¹² Today we would call this a 'mugging'. The first person to find this unfortunate man happened to be a priest.¹³ He looked at the wounded man and 'passed by' on the other side. He made no attempt to help! How much does that apply to the broad masses in the world? They do not want to know about other people's problems! They do not want to get 'involved', or they perhaps 'just do not care' - so they 'pass by on the other side' of the road!

Another traveller came along.¹⁴ He too saw this battered body lying in the road and he too crossed to the other side of the road and left the victim lying there bruised and bleeding. Then a third man¹⁵ came by; but he took

⁷Luke 10. 30-37 ⁸Luke 10. 25 ⁹Luke 10. 26 ¹⁰Luke 10. 27 ¹¹Luke 10. 29 ¹²Luke 10. 30

¹³Luke 10. 31 ¹⁴Luke 10. 32 ¹⁵Luke 10. 33-35

pity on the poor fellow lying in the road, bandaged his wounds, put him on his donkey, brought him to the next inn and took care of him. But that was not the end of it. He said to the owner of the inn *'Look after him'*, gave him money and added *'when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have'*! Now after relating the story to the lawyer, Jesus said to him, *'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man...?'*¹⁶ The man had to say *'The one who had mercy on him'*. Jesus told him, *'Go and do likewise'*.¹⁷

Now the simple lessons conveyed in this parable are that to obtain 'eternal life', our walk along God's 'Narrow Way' has to be in the spirit of love for our fellow men and women. We cannot be unconcerned, we cannot ignore other people's problems. We must help where we possibly can and it may mean that we lose out, or make sacrifices on the way. These are the commandments of Christ. These are the principles laid down in God's Word for us to follow! These principles mean that we pledge ourselves to follow the instructions laid down in God's Word, they are our guide and we will follow them.

The man who helped his 'neighbour' on the road is typical of what we should be. He put aside all thoughts of self-preservation and personal cost. While the other two no doubt had their reasons for not interrupting their journey through life, these reasons were selfish reasons! Once we set out on the 'Narrow Way', we are not living a self-seeking life any longer. We have set out to love the Almighty with all our being and that means in practical terms that we do all things with the thought of pleasing Him. That can only be done by following His words in the Bible! This way of life, Jesus said, would not be easy. It is sometimes long and wearying. There may be times when we feel like giving up and taking the easier path, but the faithful person learns patience and endurance. Also we learn that it is a rewarding and satisfying way of life now. We learn of God's love too in helping us, if we keep Him first in importance in our lives. The writer in the Psalms speaks of this encouragement we can receive from God: *'When I said, "my foot is slipping", your love, O LORD supported me. When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul'*.¹⁸ Once we make up our minds to follow the 'Narrow Way', then we will get all the help we need if we have this sort of faith and trust in God.

¹⁶Luke 10. 36 NIV ¹⁷Luke 10. 37 NIV ¹⁸Psalms 94. 18,19 NIV

The important thing is to remember why people made their decision to set out on the 'Narrow Way'. It was because God promised them 'eternal life' if they followed in the footsteps of Jesus,¹⁹ and that is what makes the effort worthwhile! Jesus followed the 'Narrow Way' not only to please his Father but also because of the glory that lay before him at the end of the journey. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus '*... who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God*'.²⁰ The same gift of immortality is offered to all of us who follow the 'Narrow Way':

'The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand...Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore...The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever. ... Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land...' ²¹

Do **YOU** know where **YOU** are going, reader?

K Dennis
Dartford, Kent

¹⁹Luke 10.25 ²⁰Hebrews 12. 2 NIV ²¹Psalms 37. 23, 24, 27, 29, 34

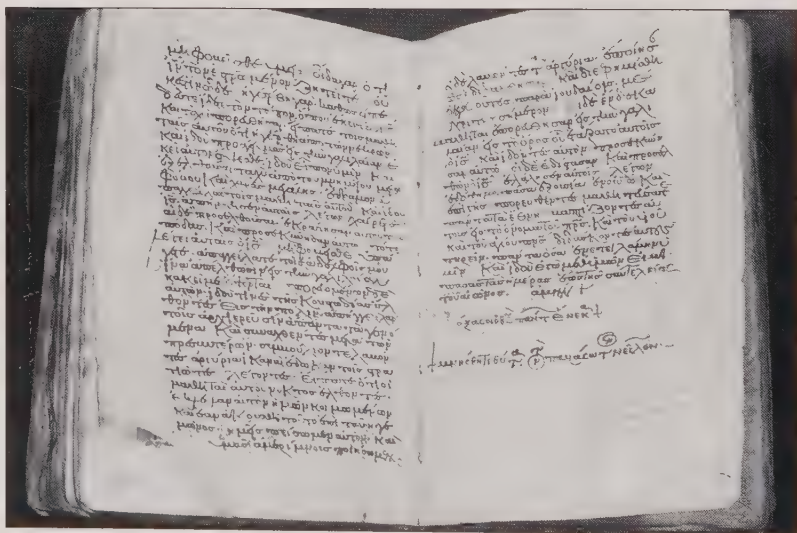
'The Bible slips to number 35'

A LEADING U.K. RETAILER carried out this year, a survey of 10,000 people who regularly buy books. People were asked to 'nominate the books that had most influenced them.'

The results make sobering reading. Out of a total of fifty titles, the Bible only ranks thirty-fifth. Consider some of the books which these ten thousand readers considered had influenced them more than the Bible;

- The Hunchback of Notre Dame (31st)
- Moby Dick (27th)
- Brideshead Revisited (22nd)
- Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (18th)
- The Jungle Book (10th)
- The Wind in the Willows (6th)
- Pride and Prejudice (2nd)

Heading this list of so-called all time greats, in first place was Lord of the Rings by J R R Tolkien.



The 'Codex Zacynthius' A Greek manuscript including part of Luke's gospel (8th Century)

Continued on page 22

In the Footsteps of Christ (5)

IN THE FOUR previous articles we have followed the footsteps of Christ throughout the land of Israel, seeing how Jesus taught the things concerning the Kingdom of God, showing himself to be the Son of God and the future king over God's Kingdom. Jesus will set up this kingdom on the earth as shown hundreds of years before through God's chosen prophets. The authority of his words were backed up, as we have seen, by the miracles and signs which no other man could do, which testified to his claim to be the Son of God, with power.

But now the time had come for Jesus to fulfil the other prophecies, and his main mission, which would now, within one week, cost him his life. His name, Jesus, given through the visit of Gabriel to his mother Mary even before his birth, signifies saviour, *'for he shall save his people from their sins.'*¹ Within one week Jesus would be put to death. Jesus knew this as he journeyed now, for the last time, to the city of God, to Jerusalem. Here, in Jerusalem, he had already met great antagonism towards him from the religious leaders, and they had already tried to kill him. Even now they were plotting how they might destroy him. Jesus knew this, and he knew what lay ahead of him, just days away, on the day when the Passover should be killed. He knew that he, on this occasion, was to be the true Passover lamb.

HOSANNA TO THE SON OF DAVID

Arriving now at the outskirts of Jerusalem, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples to the nearest village with the mission to bring back to Jesus an ass together with its colt. Jesus told them exactly where to find the animals, and what to say should they be challenged for taking them away - *'The Lord hath need of them.'*² This they did, to enable Jesus to fulfil the prophecy of Zechariah, written some 500 years earlier *'Tell ye the daughter*

¹Matthew 1.21 ²Matthew 21.3

*of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.*³

A great crowd gathered to watch Jesus as he entered the city of Jerusalem in this way, cutting branches from the trees and laying them in the way; their equivalent to the 'red carpet' treatment. '*...Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*'⁴ Little did anyone but Jesus know that within a few days these cries of praise would change to '*Crucify him*'.

IN THE TEMPLE

Jesus had stirred up the people by entering the city in this way, and no doubt many who expected the Messiah thought that he had come to set up the Kingdom of God and to overthrow the Roman power. But what did he do? He entered straight away into the temple and began to cleanse it by throwing out all those who bought and sold, those who changed money, and generally used God's house as a marketplace for ill-gotten gains. He said '*My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.*'⁵ How this would antagonise the religious rulers who had the charge of these things and who themselves made additional income out of these practices.

The chief priests, on seeing Jesus' entrance into the city, and his actions in the temple, coupled with him healing the blind and the lame in the temple, were angered greatly, and Jesus knew this, and knew that for envy and for their own preservation they were shortly to bring about his death. Instead of setting up the kingdom therefore, as expected by the people, Jesus left the people puzzled and dismayed by leaving Jerusalem again and going to the solitude of Bethany, no doubt to the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, to find some solace and comfort to prepare himself for what lay ahead.

Meanwhile in the city the people were left perplexed, and the religious rulers determined to get rid of this thorn in their sides.

RETURN TO THE CITY

The following morning Jesus returned to the city, on the way cursing the barren fig tree for not providing food for his hunger. The fig tree in the

³Matthew 21.5 (taken from Zechariah 9.9) ⁴Matthew 21.9 ⁵Matthew 21.13

Scriptures is representative of Israel, who were themselves as fruitless as that tree, and would be cursed, and wither away, as that tree did soon afterwards.

On his entry into the city Jesus made again for the temple, and on entering it and beginning to teach he was immediately confronted by the chief priests and elders of the people demanding to know by what authority he was doing these things, and who gave him the authority. Jesus confounded them by his answer, and condemned them openly for ignoring the message of God, telling them that the tax collectors and the harlots would enter into the Kingdom of God before them. In parable he taught them how they were shortly going to kill him, the son of the householder. For this they would be rejected. They knew that he spoke this parable against them, and sought to lay hands on him, but were afraid to do so, because the people still thought that Jesus was a prophet. A dilemma indeed for the religious rulers! How could they get rid of him?

They devised a plan. They allowed him to continue his preaching, and they themselves would pretend to be interested in it and to listen intently. But they would try to pick on anything he said and trap him if they could; so a delegation was sent to join him.

RENDER UNTO CAESAR

Having heard his teaching for a while, then came the first trick question, *'...Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?'*⁶ Their wicked thought was to trap him into saying something against the Roman overlords, so that the Romans could assist with their scheme to get rid of him. His reply was masterful, as he asked them to show him the money donated to the temple, and they brought him a penny. He asked them whose face appeared on the coin, and they were forced to admit that it was Caesar's. *'...Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.'*⁷ They were speechless and marvelled at his answer, unable to find anything to take hold of, and so they left him, and went on their way. But they had not given up by any means. He may have won that round, but not the contest!

⁶Matthew 22.16,17 ⁷Matthew 22.21

Jesus here, in this answer underlined the principle which applies to us today. We should obey the laws of the land where they do not conflict with the laws of God. We must render unto God first the things that are God's.

Meanwhile the Pharisees sought the assistance of the other influential spiritual leaders, the Sadducees. This class of spiritual rulers were in opposition to the Pharisees because they did not believe in the resurrection from the dead as the Pharisees did, and as Jesus had taught. So the Sadducees put to him a question concerning the resurrection of the dead. It concerned a woman who had seven husbands successively, all of whom had died. How could she be married to all of them in the coming Kingdom, following resurrection *'whose wife shall she be?'* they asked Jesus, tempting him?

Jesus' answer put these so-called religious rulers to shame by affirming both the resurrection and the Kingdom of God, and telling them in no uncertain terms *'...in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God...'* God is a God of the living, as Jesus told them, and certainly all the faithful have died in the hope of resurrection. So much then for their false beliefs.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

But there was listening to that answer a Pharisee, who was impressed by the response of Jesus, which silenced the opposition, but again he gave a question to tempt Jesus, asking him which is the great commandment in the law of Moses. Jesus answered that it was the first of the commandments to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Jesus followed this reply by further stating that the second commandment of loving one's neighbour as oneself is likewise great, and on these two commandments were built all the law of Moses and all the messages of the prophets.

Indeed that was true and the whole of the principles of God are outlined in these two commandments, to be seen openly when Jesus sets up the kingdom of God, when there will be *'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'*⁹

⁹Matthew 22.30 ⁹Luke 2.14

That Pharisee acknowledged the answer of Jesus to be true, and that these commandments were greater than any sacrifices which could be offered under the law of Moses. Jesus' reply indicated that even the Pharisee who had asked the question was not far from the Kingdom of God.

HYPOCRITES

Although that answer of the Pharisee was discreet, yet the Pharisees were now openly plotting Jesus' death, and Jesus used the occasion to preach to the people that they should be wary of these religious teachers. The people should obey the doctrines of God, but not follow their example of hypocrisy. The Pharisees and lawyers were ignoring the two greatest commandments by their hypocritical (playacting) ways, loving the praise of men rather than the praise of God. They were the custodians of the Word of God and yet their motives were all wrong. They called themselves and were called by the people 'teacher' and



Herods Temple. A scale model constructed in Jerusalem.

‘father’, yet only Christ was their teacher and God was their Father and by their actions they were rejecting both God and His beloved Son.

The religious rulers of today are similarly falsely called ‘fathers’ and like the Pharisees have that air of piety, but Jesus showed that this was all unnecessary, for we have one father, God, and one Lord, who is Christ.

THE TEMPLE

Jesus and the disciples now departed from the city of Jerusalem, and one of the disciples remarked on the magnificence of the stones and the building. (See picture on page 19.) Indeed it was, as far as man’s workmanship was concerned, a magnificent edifice which had been built by one of the Herods. It took 46 years to build and was constructed using white marble, which glistened in the sun, like snow, and was decorated with gold and other ornamental work. Jesus’ reply to the disciples must have taken them aback for he prophesied that these things that they could now see, that temple in all its magnificence, would shortly be thrown down, with not one stone left upon another.

This prophecy of Jesus was literally fulfilled following the events of AD 70. This resulted in the scattering of the Jews into all the world, the demolition of the temple by the Romans and later the temple site being ploughed as a field, all events spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. Jesus foresaw by vision these events and related them to his disciples.

They then went up into the Mount of Olives, and there before them lay a complete view of the city, with that magnificent temple in all its glory. This sight prompted the disciples to ask Jesus when this destruction would take place, and what signs would herald these things, and also Christ’s coming and the end of that era. Matthew chapter 24 and Luke chapter 21 tell us in detail of Jesus’ reply but it is not the purpose of this article to consider those prophetic words. Suffice it to say that the true disciples of Christ for nearly 2,000 years have been individually deeply interested by Jesus’ words. They tell of the days in which we live, the re-establishment of the Jews in their land, the city of Jerusalem once again in Jewish hands, and the return of Jesus to set up the Kingdom of God. Readers who are not aware of these prophecies are urged to carefully read these two chapters.

THE PLOT

It was now two days before the Passover, and we can imagine the pressure on Jesus, with so little time left, and with the thought of that cruel death ever before him. He knew from the Psalms and the Prophets exactly what was to happen to him. The reader only has to look at Psalm 22 and Isaiah chapter 53 to see the rejection and crucifixion of Christ set out in graphic detail hundreds of years before the events, and Jesus was well acquainted with these scriptures. He was shortly to be like a lamb led to the slaughter, and only two days remained, to his death. He told the disciples this openly.¹⁰

But how was Jesus' death to be brought about? The leaders desperately wanted to kill him, but how could they do it? The people still heard him, and counted him as a prophet. An assembly took place at the palace of the High Priest, Caiaphas, in which the subtle plot to kill him was discussed. It was on this occasion that Judas, one of Jesus' disciples and treasurer came to them and agreed to betray Jesus unto them for 30 pieces of silver, again in fulfilment of prophecy.

Judas was a thief, and Jesus knew this, and openly showed at the last supper who it was that should betray him. The chief priests were delighted, for he would be able to deliver Jesus to them when there were no crowds around, and when they could arrest him without the risk of intervention by the people. From that moment on, Jesus' fate was sealed, humanly speaking, and it was just a question of time as to when Judas thought was the opportune moment for his arrest.

Jesus in the meantime had gone back out of the city to Bethany. His ministry was now nearing completion, apart from his one final act of sacrifice. He had spent over three years ministering the Word, and yet it is testified *'But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him,'*¹¹ as Isaiah the prophet had previously testified. Many of the chief rulers however did believe on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not make it known, as they were fearful of being put out of the synagogues and losing their high positions in life. *'For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.'*¹²

In our final article in this series we shall follow the footsteps of Christ as they now led, in the purpose of God, to the cross, but in the meantime

¹⁰Matthew 26.1,2 ¹¹John 12.37 (taken from Isaiah 53.1) ¹²John 12.43

we must all heed the words of Jesus and consider whether the praise of men is more important to us than the praise of God: *'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.'*¹³

Clive Brooks
Horsham, Sussex

¹³Luke 9.23

NEWS

& Views

'The Bible slips to number 35'
... Continued from page 14

It is beyond dispute that readers find all of the books on the list a 'good read'. They may have helped people understand themselves or others better. They may have made them laugh or cry or they may have just been a means of escaping for a few hours from the pressures of modern life. That is the most that any of those readers could hope for.

However, of all the books that appeared on that publishers list, only one can demonstrate the ability to influence its reader to a way of life with meaning and a future. In fact, eternal life on a beautified earth. One of its readers was told this:

'...from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.'¹

There is no other book which can offer this. The Apostle Paul who wrote these words is emphatic that there is only one valid Gospel message, for he wrote:

'...though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.'²

Other books may come and go, but for me, dear reader, the Bible remains the all-time number one!

Jonathan Rowland
Meopham, Kent

¹2 Timothy 3.15 ²Galatians 1.8

BIBLE TRUTHS

The Ivory Pomegranate

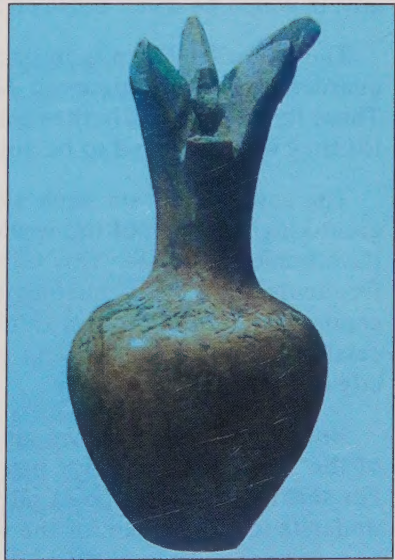
IN GOD'S WORD there are two records of the Temple being constructed in Jerusalem by Solomon.¹ These accounts tell us of the detailed work that went into this place of worship. The carvings, the coverings of cedar and fir, the decorative work, much of it overlaid with pure gold. The people of Israel worshipped God, using this magnificent Temple as the centre of their devotion. Nevertheless these same records inform us that the Jews were warned by the Almighty:

'But if you turn away...and go and serve other gods...this house which I have sanctified for my name I will cast out of my sight...everyone who passes by it will be appalled and say, "Why has the LORD done thus to this land and this house?"' Then they will answer, "Because they forsook the LORD God...and embraced other gods, and worshipped them, and served them; therefore he has brought all this calamity on them."²

The waywardness of Israel and the destruction of Solomon's temple is a matter of recorded history - including the Bible record.³ So complete has this desolation been, that there was no trace of Solomon's temple until recent times. So much so, that the critics of the Bible even denied its existence. Among the detailed work described in the decoration of Solomon's temple were pomegranates.⁴ The picture shows an **ivory pomegranate** that is now on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. It is less than 2" high, (about 41 millimetres)

The wonder of this tiny archaeological find is, that it has an inscription carved around its shoulder 'Belonging to the *Temple of YAHWEH holy to the priests.*'

The pomegranate could have been a decorative mace head to the priest's sceptre, or perhaps had some other ornamental use on a throne or altar. For students of the Scriptures, we have an object that dates back to Solomon's



The Temple ivory pomegranate

¹1 Kings Chap 6; 2 Chronicles Chap's 2 to 5 NKJV ²2 Chronicles 7.19-22 NKJV

³2 Chronicles 36.17-21 NKJV ⁴2 Chronicles 3.16 & 4.13 NKJV

temple, with its priests and elaborate ritual performed under the Law of Moses. This was all carried out as the Bible tells us and is another confirmation of the truth of God's Word. It confirms that the Temple was there in Jerusalem and that those prophetic words of punishment upon Israel have been fulfilled because of their disobedience.

Ken Dennis
Dartford, Kent

COVER PICTURE

OUR COVER PICTURE is taken within the palace of one of the four ancient capital cities of Assyria, known today as Iraq. Three of these cities lay within a thirty mile radius of the modern day city of Mosul, which is in North Iraq.

This is the city of Nimrud, called Calah in the Scriptural record of Genesis 10.11,12. It was rebuilt first by Shalmaneser I about 1248 BC, then by Ashurnasirpal II, in 879 BC. Tiglath-Pileser III, his son, launched his attack against Israel and Judah from this his capital city, in which he dwelt between 745 to 727 BC.

The gateway shown is in one of the palace courtyards, which is guarded by two huge carved statues of beasts with human heads. These figures abound in the ruins of this city on walls and entrances, for they were believed to be guardian spirits.

The inscriptions on each side of the doorway proclaim: 'The great king, the king of the world, the king of Assyria.' These kings have come and gone. This city like so many others lies in ruins, frequented only by archaeologists and tourists. But Israel and their capital city Jerusalem, is with us even to this day. 1996-97 has been celebrated as the 3,000th year since king David made it the capital city of Israel.

But as history has shown, and prophecy declares, the true 'King of the World, Jesus Christ' has yet to come to take up his throne.¹ For this is the true hope of all those who study the Scriptures and understand God's plan for the world revealed in its pages.

¹*Psalm 2.*

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